Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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The $12 Billion Florida Scam

Hurricane Andrew hit south Miami at around 2 am, August 24, 1992. Before it was blown off the roof, the wind gauge at Homestead Air Force Base clocked a wind speed of 217 miles per hour. From south Miami, through Homestead and into Key Largo and the Everglades, Andrew left a swath of destruction about 30 miles wide. In disaster lies opportunity. The building contractors entered happily into a boom that turned out to be one of the most ebullient in the state's history.

Homestead Air Force Base was flattened by the storm and in late 1993 the Air Force decided to move out. The Defense Department put Homestead high on its closure list and in 1994 proposed to transfer the base to Dade County, free of charge. The county had a big plan for the site: to build another large commercial airport there, thus relieving the pressure on Miami International Airport a few miles to the northeast of Homestead.

These plans for Homestead soon aroused the concern of local conservation groups, since the old Air Force Base sits amidst Biscayne National Park, the Everglades and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The $12 billion development planned for Homestead – the largest in the history of southern Florida – spelled 230,000 annual overflights of commercial jetliners in and out of the new airport, plus toxic stormwater and sewage leaching through Homestead's porous limestone.

As plans for the scheme began to shape up, observers of the real estate scene in Dade County were startled to find that the County was not putting the plans for the construction of the airport and the attendant commercial center up for competitive bids. Instead, Dade County manager Joaquin Avino recommended that the development rights be awarded to an unknown company, Homestead Air Base Developers, Inc., known as HABDI.

Despite the presence of other consortia offering as much as $64 million for the development rights, Dade County lost no time in signing an exclusive 70-year lease and development agreement with HABDI, without asking for a penny in exchange. Two weeks after Dade County commissioners voted to award HABDI the contract, Joaquin Avino announced that he was resigning from his position as county manager and seeking fresh opportunity with Wolfberg Alverez and Partners, an engineering firm that had been previously hired by HABDI for its new contract. Wolfberg Alverez stands to make nearly $10 million on the project.

Who is behind HABDI? Its president is a Cuban-American by the name of Carlos Herrera. Herrera also heads the Latin Builders Association, regarded by many as the most powerful political group in South Florida. Two of the other HABDI partners, Pedro Adrian and Camillo Jaime, are also officers of the Latin Builders Association. The Latin Builders Association has had an unsavory history in local politics. In the words of the *Miami Herald*, the Association was involved "in the greatest corruption case the US Attorney's office ever made in Miami". Back in 1989, several officers of the Association had been caught on tape offering cash bribes to Dade County commissioners.

To this organization, Carlos Herrera brought talents deemed by one Dade County commissioner to be unpalatable. Since Herrera assumed control of the Association, Miquel Diaz de la Portilla claims it has "engaged in vicious, violent, mean-spirited, destructive, hateful and demagogic campaigns".

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Herrera was born outside Havana in 1958, the year before Fidel Castro led his revolution into power. Herrera's mother was a beautician who took her son to Florida in 1964, where they settled in Hialeah. Herrera dropped out of school at the age of 15 to work for an air conditioning company. Three years later he started his own business, Local Air Conditioning, which he runs to this day.

How Herrera made the jump from A/C repairman to mega-developer remains obscure. At all events he soon deployed the appurtenances of success, his home decorated with big-game trophies – a Cape buffalo brought down in Zambia, a Royal Crown elk killed on the exotic game ranch he owns in Colorado and a rare spotted leopard taken from South Africa.

One of the directors of the Latin Builders Association is Miguel DeGrandy. DeGrandy is also the chief lobbyist for HABDI, as well being a partner of the Miami/DC law firm Greenberg Traurig. The managing partner of Greenberg Traurig is Marvin Rosen. And here we enter the financial air space of the Democratic Party, since Rosen served as chairman of the party's finance committee from 1994 through the recent election.

Marvin Rosen cut his teeth in Democratic Party politics back in 1980 when he was the Florida coordinator of Senator Ted Kennedy's doomed effort to wrest the Democratic Party nomination from President Jimmy Carter. Though Kennedy did badly, Rosen proved himself a whiz at beating the bushes for money. By 1984 he was the leading fundraiser for Fritz Mondale. In 1988 Rosen served as finance chairman of the Dukakis campaign and, during the cash-strapped days of Clinton's 1992 bid, was personally solicited by Gov. Bill to raise money. He celebrated Inaugural victory in the company of the Clintons and the Gores.

Seeking to capitalize on such a long investment in time and effort, Rosen opened a DC office for his law firm in 1993 and immediately hired Ron Brown's son Michael to be his director of legislative affairs. He also recruited Ted Kennedy's new wife, Victoria.

Rosen's Kennedy connection was not irrelevant to plans afoot for Homestead. Back in early Clinton time, Ted Kennedy sat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, which was overseeing the base closures, including Homestead. Rosen and Kennedy arranged a meeting between Herrera and then Transportation Secretary Frederico Pena, at Kennedy's estate in McLean, Virginia. The encounter took place on April 3, 1996. The meeting with Pena was crucial because the Federal Aviation Administration (part of Pena's bailiwick at Transportation) must approve the lease, designs and operations of the new commercial airport.

After the Virginia rendezvous, Herrera told the *Miami Herald*, "I'm a respectful guy. I always go to the highest person possible to explain what I am doing. With my contacts and the help of certain senators I called Pena and got a meeting. The guy is accessible. I just wanted to give the guy a face-to-face briefing. I wanted to tell him where we stood on the lease itself, and to tell him we were going to be meeting with the FAA soon to get their approval. He listened. He said he was glad we had gone up to see him, and to keep him informed."

Herrera later reckoned that between 1994 and the end of 1996 he had given more than $100,000 to the Democratic Party and to politicians such as Ted Kennedy, John Kerry, Robert Torricelli and Bill Clinton.

One of the first of the now notorious White House "coffees" in 1994 saw the presence of Herrera, soon after his former lawyer Marvin Rosen had been installed as finance chairman of the Democratic National Committee. In the wake of his first White House visit, Herrera gave $25,000 to the DNC. "When I first met the president", Herrera later disclosed, "I had not contributed a penny. Any politician who would listen without me giving a penny gets a lot of respect. Afterwards I did contribute as much as I could."

Four further meetings between Clinton, Al Gore and Herrera took place over the next two years and Herrera later reported that the chief executives had "opened up some doors for me". Herrera continued to show his gratitude to the party. A week after the fall election he sent a $15,000 check to the DNC.

The doors that Herrera yearned to see opened were first, the rapid transfer of the title of the Air Force base to Dade County; second, an agreement that the tab for potentially expensive environmental clean-up of existing hazardous waste on the site would be borne by the federal government; third, that HABDI would get speedy approval from the FAA for the airport plans; fourth, that all of this would take place without the costly and disruptive ordeal of an environmental impact statement. This desire to cut through persnickety red tape – otherwise known as the laws of the land – was beautifully expressed by Rosen's associate Miguel DeGrandy, the lobbyist for HABDI. In January, DeGrandy told the Miami weekly *New Times*, "Based on Clinton's agenda for reinventing government, and wanting to flow everything down from the local government, it wouldn't make sense for the White House to be getting involved in what's really a local zoning issue."

But for the Clinton White House the concerns of Herrera were most emphatically not a local zoning issue. The White House's game plan for 1996, repeating the more tenuous hope of 1992, was to win Florida, where Cuban-Americans have become a potent political force and where the support of men like Herrera was eagerly desired. Of course the money was

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The Valujet Cover-Up

The main conclusion of the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and Security presided over by Gore was the need for "profiling" of passengers as a means of eliminating potential bombers and hijackers from the skies. From the point of view of the airlines and the FAA this had the benefit of suggesting that aviation safety is primarily a police matter. It shifted attention away from murderously unsafe airplanes flown with the sanction of the FAA.

Two crashes in the past year have focused attention on flight safety: TWA 800 and Valujet 592. No one knows what brought the TWA plane down. Despite the outrageous "anti terrorism" legislation spawned in its name, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that sabotage was involved. There is, however, plenty of evidence about the cause of the Valujet disaster, in which 109 people were killed. This evidence has so far been ignored or suppressed by the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board.

Copious leaks from the NTSB have led the public to believe that the Valujet plane crashed because overage oxygen generators (that supply oxygen for the yellow cups above passenger seats) were improperly shipped as cargo, spontaneously burst into flame and in turn ignited the plane itself. But laboratory tests aimed at reproducing an oxygen generator fire have failed to excite so much as a spark. As the laboratory report concluded " ... the overall probability of the oxygen generation canister involvement [is] about as likely as a snow storm in Miami".

This canard served the useful purpose of diverting attention from the fact that this particular plane was in lethally dangerous condition and, crucially, from the very high probability that the immediate cause of the crash was thick smoke in the cockpit which blinded the pilots.

Buried deep in documentation on the crash released by the NTSB was a statement from an anonymous witness, who would say only that he was a Valujet employee in fear for his job. The witness noted that the plane's wiring was so notoriously bad that mechanics were afraid to work on it and that on the day of the crash " ... the Valujet mechanic working on the aircraft had by-passed two circuit breakers behind the captain's seat". This is criminally dangerous because, with circuit breakers bypassed, it is impossible to prevent an electrical overload and consequent electrical fire causing dense, toxic smoke from the burning circuits.

That this had been the fate of Valujet 592 is suggested by frantic shouts over the radio of "Smoke in the cockpit, smoke in the cabin" just before the crash, not to mention the scorched and sooty items inside the cockpit, electronics bay and circuit breaker area retrieved from the wreckage in the Everglades.

In pursuit of its oxygen canister theory, the NTSB postulates a fatal fire in the rear cargo area, leading to a loss of flight controls and a final dive from 7,000 feet straight into the swamp. Yet eyewitness reports and the radar plot show that the plane was flying level and close to the ground just before it rolled to one side and went into the ground. In other words, the pilot may have been attempting an emergency crash landing.

"The overall probability of the oxygen generation canister involvement [is] about as likely as a snow storm in Miami."

One possible reason for the failure of this desperate attempt was that the pilot could see neither his instruments nor the ground because of the smoke in the cockpit. This, in turn, helps explain the authorities' desire to obscure the real cause of the accident.

Blinding smoke in the cockpit has incontestably caused at least twelve fatal crashes in recent years, thirteen if we include Valujet, killing almost a thousand people. Despite an FAA regulation requiring that "If accumulation of hazardous quantities of smoke in the cockpit area is reasonably probable, smoke evacuation must be readily accomplished", the agency has consistently refused to enforce its own regulation.

Bert Werjefelt, who has collected much of the information outlined above, is an engineer and inventor who has developed a simple but ingenious device in the form of a clear plastic bubble that inflates to fit over the instrument panel and part of the window. A filter keeps the air inside the bubble clear of smoke and allows a pilot to see enough to land the plane.

For years Werjefelt has been strenuously lobbying the FAA to enforce its cockpit smoke regulation, but to no avail. Prior to the opening of Gore's aviation safety hearings, Werjefelt took out newspaper advertisements (ignored in the news columns) drawing attention to the probable cause of the Valujet crash and the attendant official cover-up.

He also pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, the yellow oxygen masks stored over passengers' seats provide no protection against smoke and are of limited use only in case of decompression in the cabin. Valujet passengers choking on the smoke in the cabin tried in vain to use their masks to breathe, as evidenced by a flight attendant's scream heard on the cockpit area microphone, "we need oxygen, we can't get oxygen back there". There are proper protective systems available for passengers. Gore's official plane is so equipped. The FAA has refused to mandate their provision on civilian airliners.

During the February 12 Gore hearing, Commission member Victoria Cummock, president of Families of 103 Lockerbie and a sterling exception to the hacks and timeservers (including Valujet champion Federico Pena) otherwise populating the ranks of commissioners, raised the issue of smoke in the cockpit.

Al was ready for the question. "Some guy", he announced authoritatively, had been taking out full page ads in the papers trying to sell a device that allowed pilots to see in a smoke filled cockpit. However, the Veep went on, the device had been tested by the FAA, the NTSB and the Department of Transportation Inspector General and "it doesn't work".

This was a straightforward lie. Werjefelt's device has been tested and certified by the FAA itself as long ago as 1990. The kindest explanation is that Gore's staff, deliberately misinformed by the bureaucrats, was too lazy to check.

After the hearing, Cummock remarked sadly that while the mandate of the hearings had been to enhance aviation safety and security, the lion's share of the time had been devoted to putting together regulations that would "enhance aviation (industry) at the expense of safety and security". Par for the course. ■

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Make-Up Hints From Feinstein and Moseley-Braun

How To Make Murderers Look Good

Those people who believed that the growing number of women senators would soften the soul of the upper chamber were keenly disappointed during last year's congressional debate on welfare "reform". With the exception of Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois, every female senator voted for a bill that will push one million additional children into poverty. In addition to tossing welfare kids into the street, women senators have taken a steely-eyed view on human rights, as seen in the cases of China and Nigeria. The chief apologist for the former is California Senator Dianne Feinstein, while the latter's prime sponsor is Moseley-Braun herself.

Feinstein is a long-time shill for Peking, but even seasoned observers of her conduct reeled when she recently proposed creating a joint presidential commission to initiate an "open dialogue" about human rights. This commission, said Feinstein, should look not simply at China's shortcomings but also at the National Guard killing of students at Kent State, the lynching of black Americans and beating of peaceful civil rights marchers, the government's forced internment of Japanese Americans during WWII and the police beating of Rodney King.

If Feinstein is sincere about heading such an inquiry, we volunteer to purchase for her the collected works of Noam Chomsky. There she can find many more examples of US abuses of human rights. But her suggestion is plainly a smoke screen to prevent a serious look at China's awful record. As one staffer in Congress – where Feinstein's proposal is the subject of great amusement – said of the senator's proposal, "She's a complete fraud. She has no interest in human rights problems in China."

Feinstein's romance with China dates to the 1970s when she was mayor of San Francisco and became close friends with Jiang Zemin, then mayor of Peking and now China's president. In explaining her interest in US-China relations, Feinstein has jokingly said that "in my last life I was Chinese".

It's not possible to confirm this, but even if true her passion for Peking is more likely tied to the fact that her husband in her current life, merchant banker Richard Blum, has substantial business and real estate interests in China. Blum manages $750 million in investments for about 70 companies, with a large chunk of that amount tied up in China. Blum is also a director of Shanghai Pacific Partners, a major import-export firm. In 1994, Feinstein led efforts to renew most favored nation trade status for Peking while her husband prepared to invest $150 million of his clients' money, along with $2 to $3 million of his own, in China.

During a recent visit to Nigeria, Moseley-Braun met with the man who supervised Saro-Wiwa's execution.

Blum also sits on the board of Northwest Airlines, a company in which he holds a six per cent share. His interest in the firm may be one reason that China's rulers have been so friendly towards the company. Northwest obtained the first non-stop flights from the US to China about a year ago. The company also recently formed an "alliance" with Air China, the big government-run airline, which means the two firms will cooperate in areas such as scheduling and marketing, as well as in carrying each other's passengers.

A curious twist here is that Feinstein is contemplating a run for governor in California in 1998. So, too, is Northwest's CEO, the awful Alfred Checci. A long-time political and financial supporter of Feinstein, Checci is worth $550 million and has said he'll spend up to $30 million if he decides to run.

Blum has also been a major financial supporter of his wife's political career. He is said to have raised more than $1 million for her campaign against Michael Huffington in 1994 and loaned her $3 million for her failed 1990 gubernatorial bid. Blum's largesse has been rewarded. On at least three ocassions, Feinstein has voted for appropriations bills that funneled money to firms partly owned by her husband. Between 1980 – the year they were married – and 1993, their income rose from $292,000 to $3.9 million.

While Feinstein toils for China, Moseley-Braun shills for Nigeria. That country has long been a human rights dungeon, but it has attracted particular attention since 1993, when Gen. Sani Abacha annulled elections won by an opposition leader, Moshood Abiola, and promptly threw the victor in jail. In 1995 Abacha's regime executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other human rights activists.

In an effort to burnish its image in the US, Nigeria has targeted the African-American community. It has paid for a number of trips to the country by African-American leaders, including newspaper publishers and clergymen. Through a Beltway pr firm, Nigeria has also taken out a series of eight-page advertising supplements in black newspapers. Randall Robinson of TransAfrica has said that a Nigerian businessman offered to pay him $1 million if his group would drop its opposition to the Abacha regime.

Because she is the only black senator, Moseley-Braun has been eagerly courted by Nigeria. She traveled there last August as a guest of state and came back carrying a letter for President Clinton from Abacha. Accompanying her on this journey was her former fiancé and campaign manager, Kgosie Matthews, who has worked as a lobbyist for Nigeria. Moseley-Braun did not meet with any opposition leaders but did squeeze in a pleasant chat with Col. Dauda Musa Komo, the man who supervised the execution of Saro-Wiwa.

This was Moseley-Braun's second trip to Nigeria. Back in 1992 she skipped orientation for new senators in Washington and traveled to Lagos, also in the company of Matthews. Her fiancé's hiring as a lobbyist for the Nigerian generals followed that visit.

Moseley-Braun has led the pro-Nigeria caucus in Congress, last year testifying against a sanctions bill that was killed in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Feinstein, a member of the Committee, never even showed up for the hearing. Her absence was reportedly due to heavy lobbying from Chevron, one of the oil companies that has a big stake in Nigeria.

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Kissinger in Greek Hit Plan?

When the National Archives began releasing long-secret documents from the Nixon era last October, few people waited with more interest than Elias Demetracopoulos. Back in the 1970s the Greek junta then in power planned to murder Demetracopoulos, who was exiled in Washington (where he still resides). Demetracopoulos believes that the junta's plans were supported by some people in the US government, including Henry Kissinger, and says he has reason to believe that the truth is contained among the documents at the Archives.

Demetracopoulos was a left-wing democrat and therefore detested by successive US governments. A 1963 CIA memo reads, "State [Department] pressing for any substantive derogatory data which can be utilized to deny subject [Demetracopoulos] subsequent entry to US." The CIA never did turn up anything "derogatory" on Demetracopoulos, which allowed him to move to Washington in 1967 after the military coup. By dint of his tireless efforts to expose their brutal rule, he beame a major annoyance to the Greek generals.

To put a stop to his activities, the junta devised a scheme to kidnap Demetracopoulos and smuggle him home on a plane or submarine. In Athens, he was to be executed. Secret cables disclosed by Jack Anderson in 1975 showed that Greek plotters were confident they could "rely on the cooperation of the various agencies of the US government".

For 20 years Demetracopoulos has tried to determine which "agencies of the US government" the junta spoke of with such confidence. Among the items he has obtained are indexes of documents from the National Security Council, headed during this period by Kissinger. One notation refers to a document from December 18, 1970 which refers to "Mr. Demetracopoulos' death in Athens prison". That date is from the period when the Greek dictatorship was making its first attempts to kidnap Demetracopoulos and it seems to indicate that the NSC was aware of Demetracopoulos' planned fate. Another document he secured, this one from the CIA, refers to a "long Kissinger memo on Elias [Demetracopoulos]."

Through his attorneys, Kissinger has for many years maintained that he had no knowledge of the case and that he was not in possession of any documents concerning Demetracopoulos. Confronted with the NSC and CIA memos, Kissinger stonewalled for seven years before finally replying in 1987. At that time he said efforts had been made to search his collection of personal papers – which have been deeded to the Library of Congress and are not available for 25 years – "for copies of documents which meet the description provided ... No such copies could be found."

Demetracopoulos believed that all would be made clear with the release of materials from the National Archive, whose index of materials to be made public said that documents referring to his case could be found in Box 26. When the great day came, Demetracopoulos found that in Box 26 precisely one document related to him. It was a memo to then White House counsel John Dean from his assistant, Fred Fielding. The memo says only that the State Department had given Congress "bad info that it will not stand behind if info becomes public. What a grand screw-up".

The truth about Kissinger's possible role in the attempted kidnapping of Demetracopoulos may still be buried at the National Archives, which released 28,000 documents but kept another 140,000 classified on grounds of national security. "Nixon resigned, Mitchell, Dean and others went to jail," Demetracopoulos says of the Watergate-era gang. "Meanwhile, Kissinger makes millions of dollars at his consulting firm. He has never paid any price, financially, legally or morally." ■

(Feinstein, cont. from p. 4)

In mid-February, a group of pro-democracy Nigerians traveled to Washington to meet with members and staffers, including Chailandu Pegues of Moseley-Braun's office. Notes from the meeting taken by the Nigerians say, "We went from a provocative strategy session to a bout of strategic provocation". The low point came when Pegues told the visitors that his boss was "outraged" by the execution of Saro-Wiwa but that Nigeria's legal system was an internal matter except in cases of gross violations of human rights. The execution of Saro-Wiwa and the other eight activists was "too close to call", Pegues said.

Moseley-Braun and Nigeria's other supporters claim that African Americans are deeply split over Nigeria. This alleged rupture is vastly overstated. In the Congressional Black Caucus, only Moseley-Braun and William Jefferson of Louisiana have opposed sanctions against Nigeria.

Nigeria plans to hold local elections next month and a presidential balloting next year. When you hear Moseley-Braun describing them as the first step to democracy, keep in mind that the government has allowed only pro-Abacha parties to register. The general himself has said he may run as a civilian, thereby allowing the country to return to "civilian rule". ■

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(Everglades, cont. from p. 2)
nice, too. As Alan Farago, of the Miami chapter of the Sierra Club puts it, "Bill Clinton doesn't have any ethics. He just follows the money. But now he must really be surprised to find himself trapped in the sewers of south Florida politics."

And indeed the White House has been riding two horses. In an effort to capture the national environmental vote, Gore had been point man in a scheme to broker a deal restraining some of the more outlandish predations of the Cuban-American sugar growers around the southern end of Lake Okeechobee, who had been pouring phosphorous into the Everglades. Gore's efforts, which in the end pleased no one, ran athwart the instincts and hopes of the developer lobby, which had been ladling out the cash to Clinton.

To put a good public face on the situation, the White House dispatched Katie McGinty to Florida on January 10 of this year. McGinty was Gore's former chief enviro aide and is now head of the President's Council on Environmental Quality, whose functions include overseeing the development of federal environmental impact statements and ensuring that the nation's environmental laws are being upheld. As she departed for Florida, McGinty issued a public bulletin welcome to Herrera. She declared it should be looked at over the next couple of months, but that in the meantime the development project should go forward. Though entirely illegal, this is in line with present administration policy, which is to tell the bureaucrats in advance of the desired decision, whatever their subsequent investigations might disclose. Herrera said that his interpretation of McGinty's statement was that HABDI could proceed with as much as one million square feet of construction.

In other words, without competitive bidding, with no disclosure and no environmental impact statement, HABDI has been given the green light to undertake a vast project with potentially disastrous environmental implications.

The Miami group of the Sierra Club and other green outfits have requested a criminal investigation by the Justice Department, addressing the following questions:

- Where does the money behind HABDI come from? Even though it is about to undertake a multi-billion development scheme involving public assets, HABDI has never been required to open up its financial books. Rumors and speculation persist that the hundreds of millions of dollars needed to finance the project are coming from a combination of drug money and funds from South American-owned airline companies brought into the project by Jorge Mas Canosa, head of the Cuban-American Foundation. Much of the money given by Herrera to the DNC was drawn from HABDI accounts, which could mean that the party's treasury opened a southern as well as an eastern front in the battle for foreign contributions, which are illegal.
- Did HABDI bribe Dade County officials to approve the exclusive lease arrangement without calling for prospectuses or putting the project up for competitive bidding? Many of the players in the 1989 bribery scandal are now promoting the Homestead deal with a similar enthusiasm. Moreover, in December 1995 HABDI hired a money man called Howard Gary to convince hesitant commissioners of the financial sturdiness of HABDI. Gary was later arrested for his role in a kickback scheme as part of another south Florida development. Gary avoided prosecution by becoming a government informant.
- Did Marvin Rosen, the main partner of HABDI's law firm, Greenberg Traurig, use his position as finance chairman of the DNC to influence the transfer of the Homestead Air Force base? If he did, and there certainly seems to be plenty of evidence that he was organizing meetings between his clients and government officials, then this would be a violation of the Hatch Act and the Federal Elections Campaign Act.

But the Sierra Club group and the other petitioners aren't holding their breaths, since the person to whom they are directing their plea for criminal investigations is the US Attorney General, Janet Reno. They remember well how Reno, in her previous incarnation as Dade County district attorney, turned the blindest of eyes to political corruption and the rise of the Cuban-American mafia. ■

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